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SUBJECT: PANAMA A NATURAL FIT FOR THE GLOBAL MARITIME
PARTNERSHIP

REF: STATE 50488

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1. (U) Summary. Panama represents a natural fit for the Global Maritime Partnership (GMP). Our engagement with Panama on maritime issues is broad and deep. Officially, the Panama Maritime Authority is supportive of the Global Maritime Partnership. Panama and the United States already cooperate on a range of projects, such as PANAMAX military exercises and U.S. naval humanitarian assistance efforts. Panama potentially will expand cooperation to include participation in the Maritime Security and Safety Information System (MSSIS), support for NAVSOUTH's Maritime Liaison Unit for Latin America (MARLU-LATAM), and collaboration on digital ID cards for merchant mariners. End Summary.

2. (U) Econoff and Naval Attach briefed Carlos Moreno, Deputy Administrator of the Panama Maritime Authority (AMP), of the Global Maritime Partnership (GMP) on June 3. Moreno was extremely receptive to GMP principles and further cooperation. Post will also track the maritime industry's reaction to the level of cooperation between the GOP and USG. End summary.

GMP PROJECTS RIPE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

3. (SBU) The following proposals were presented to Moreno and he was "extremely interested" in both.

A) Maritime Security and Safety Information System (MSSIS): The Commander of NAVSOUTH has been promoting MSSIS to various countries in the Latin American region. Moreno was enthusiastic about the MSSIS concept, since Panama would gain worldwide, near-real-time visibility of merchant ship operations, to include the 7,000-plus merchant vessels of Panamanian registry. Moreno also keyed in on the fact that MSSIS is already in operation and is relatively inexpensive to implement. Moreno then pointed out that the International Maritime Organization's LRIT (Long Range Identification and Tracking) system was behind schedule and expensive. Moreno instructed his staff to work with the Naval Attache on producing a proposal for the AMP Administrator.

B) Maritime Liaison Unit - Latin America (MARLU-LATAM): MARLU-LATAM is subordinate to the Commander of NAVSOUTH (the naval component of SOUTHCOM), and is charged with establishing close working relationships between the U.S. Navy and commercial maritime entities throughout Latin America. AMEMBASSY PANAMA continues to support MARLU-LATAM as it develops close ties with Panama's diverse maritime industry. During MARLU-LATAM's visits in March and June 2008, DAO Panama facilitated access to a wide range of maritime industry contacts. MARLU-LATAM will return in August 2008 for follow-up talks regarding a wide-range of GMP-related topics. After listening to a brief presentation about MARLU-LATAM, Moreno offered his support, and stated that such a project was "long overdue."

C) Moreno highlighted a current AMP initiative to provide digital ID cards with biometrics to the approximately 300,000 merchant marine sailors whose licenses originate in Panama. Moreno was receptive to the idea of collaboration with the U.S., since the U.S. Coast Guard is implementing the TWIX (Transit Workers Identification) card program.

CURRENT GMP-RELATED PROJECTS

14. (SBU) Panama already is currently participating in several GMP-related activities, such as:

A) Fuerzas Aliadas PANAMAX: PANAMAX is an annual joint/combined exercise co-hosted by Panama and USSOUTHCOM.

It is USSOUTHCOM's premier exercise and security cooperation event aimed at enhancing the capabilities of partner nations to conduct multinational operations. PANAMAX draws military participants and observers from over 20 countries and will be held 11-22 Aug 2008.

B) Humanitarian Assistance: Following the example of last year's successful deployment of the hospital ship USNS Comfort, USSOUTHCOM is deploying the USS KEARSARGE to Panama to provide humanitarian assistance, including medical services and engineering projects, at five locations in the Comarca of Kuna Yala. AMEMBASSY PANAMA personnel will deploy to the Comarca of Kuna Yala to support this security cooperation event 16-30 Sep 2008.

C) Port Security: GOP and USG customs agencies signed a declaration of principles for the Container Security Initiative (CSI). CSI has provided the GOP with x-ray equipment and funds for maintenance. The DoE's MegaPorts Initiative is following CSI in the installation of sophisticated radiological detection equipment to identify nuclear material.

COMMENT: PANAMA WELL-SUITED FOR GMP

15. (SBU) Panama represents a natural fit for the GMP, as our engagement with Panama on maritime issues is broad and deep. With the Panama Canal, which has embarked on a \$5.25 expansion project, a booming ports and maritime services industry, some 7,000 Panamanian flagged vessels sailing the seas, and a registry of more than 300,000 seafarers, the GOP and the maritime industry are keenly interested in virtually all aspects of GMP activities. However, until the GMP takes further shape, Post does not expect that Panama would take a proactive role in initiating specific GMP activities.
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